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SUBJECT Aid for the Contras

PETER JENNINGS: Secretary of State Shultz went to the House Foreign Affairs Committee today to argue in favor of renewed aid for the Contras trying to overthrow the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

As ABC's John McWethy reports, the Secretary was preaching a new gospel to a largely skeptical audience.

JOHN MCWETHY: George Shultz brought with him to Capitol Hill today the Administration's new sales pitch for why Congress ought to provide money to the 14,000-man guerrilla army that seeks to overthrow the government of Nicaragua.

SECRETARY OF STATE GEORGE SHULTZ: I think that we do have a moral duty to support people who are trying to bring about freedom of their country.

MCWETHY: Shultz argues that Congress should give the CIA money to support the Contra guerrillas so the guerrillas can force Nicaragua's government to either change its ways or be swept aside.

SECRETARY SHULTZ: What we have in Nicaragua is a government that is bad news. Now, how can that get changed? We'd like them to see the error of their way.

MCWETHY: This is a very different rationale than the Administration used just a year ago when it claimed that the primary reason to fund the guerrillas was to cut off the supply of weapons to leftist guerrillas in neighboring El Salvador.

Even with the new rationale, Shultz today encountered

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some stiff criticism of covert activity.

REP. MICHAEL BARNES: We all know why it's covert. It's covert because it's illegal, under international law.

REP. GERRY STUDDS: I suggest, I think, I hope, that funding for the Contras is dead in this Congress.

MCWETHY: It is not dead if Ronald Reagan has anything to say about it. To get money for the men he calls freedom fighters, Administration sources say, the President is willing to expend a great deal of personal capital. And, they acknowledge, to win this one he will probably have to.

JENNINGS: George Will is with us tonight in Washington, and he has some thoughts on whether the government in Nicaragua should be overthrown.

GEORGE WILL: Peter, I think it should, and we should try to do it openly.

For years now, our covert aid has been about as covert as a brass band. It's time to face facts. The facts are that the Sandinista regime is a Soviet-style regime. They brag about it. The Sandinista regime is exporting revolution. Again, bragging about it.

Is there a chance, the hope that you can reform such a regime internally through pluralism, through negotiations? No hope in history offered -- offered by history for this.

Therefore, why not help those who are trying to help themselves? No one's asking for American soldiers. The Contras are willing to do it.

Peter, I hear no objections to American spending hundreds of millions of dollars to help the Afghanistan Contras kill Soviet troops to try and reclaim their country.

In fact, people say, "Well, you can't bring democracy with force." We brought it to Italy. We brought it to France. We brought it to Western Europe by force, by American arms at the end of the Second World War.

JENNINGS: George, covert or overt, aren't you somewhat ignoring international law?

WILL: Well, Peter, I wish we could run international affairs the way the Warren Court wanted to run the judicial system in this country. It's an untidy world out there.

I think this country ought to remember that if we hadn't

3

had aid from France and Spain and elsewhere for George Washington's Contras, we wouldn't have had this country.